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Subject: [External] The week's Top Five on NC Policy Watch

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NC POLICY WATCH

Stories & voices
that **matter.**

The week's Top Five on NC Policy Watch:



1. Over widespread opposition, DEQ approves key water quality permit for Atlantic Coast Pipeline

For more than a year, environmental and citizens' groups have battled against the Atlantic Coast Pipeline. But today, the NC Department of Environmental Quality granted a key permit that will allow the project to begin its 160-mile route through the state.

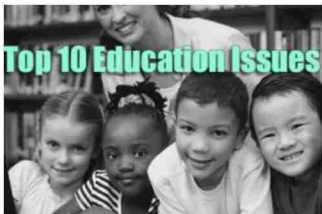
DEQ's Division of Water Resources announced today that it is approving the 401 water quality permit after eight months' of review. DWR had asked for additional information five times before finalizing the permit.

Duke Energy co-owns the Atlantic Coast Pipeline with Dominion Energy. The pipeline will begin at a fracking operation in West Virginia, continue through Virginia and North Carolina, and possibly extend through South Carolina.

DEQ Secretary Michael Regan said in a prepared statement that the agency "left no stone unturned in our exhaustive eight-month review of every aspect of the 401 application. Our job doesn't end with the granting of the permit but continues as we hold the company accountable to live up to its commitments." [[Read more...](#)]

Bonus reads:

- [Duke Energy, ready to build the Atlantic Coast Pipeline, goes to the top: Gov. Cooper](#)
- [Where to put NC's coal ash? Court of Appeals asked to rule on legality of high-profile option](#)



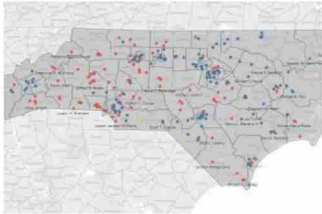
2. Class size crisis, school inequities highlight top 10 education issues for 2018

An impending class size crisis and growing inequities between rich and poor districts are the most important issues facing North Carolina public schools in 2018, according to an annual list released Wednesday by the nonpartisan Public School Forum of N.C.

The list—prepared by the Raleigh-based policy and research outfit—arrives with state legislators still negotiating the terms of a potential respite for North Carolina's 115 school districts, brought on by a 2016 order

to cut K-3 class sizes that lacks sufficient funding to make it happen, critics say.

“The class size mandate is affecting every single school in North Carolina,” says Keith Poston, president and executive director of the Public School Forum. “The ripple effect—up to ballooning classes in grades 4-12, to the risk of losing classes in upper grades, to the very real fact that there’s no way our schools can meet this mandate in seven months and also keep our arts and P.E. teachers and come up with several hundred classrooms that don’t exist today— it is a self-inflicted crisis.” [[Read more...](#)]



3. The “double-bunkings” continue: An analysis of the G.A.’s latest proposed judicial maps

How many maps does it take to hit the sweet spot when it comes to judicial redistricting?

Your guess is as good as anyone’s. Rep. Justin Burr (R-Stanly, Montgomery) unveiled another round of judicial and prosecutorial maps this week, and, like the others, he didn’t include any substantive information about the impact on judges and the people they serve.

This is the seventh version of House Bill 717 that lawmakers have entertained as a possible plan for redistricting judges and prosecutors. It’s the third set of maps that NC Policy Watch has taken on to analyze incumbency data.

There have been three different committees formed since the first time Burr made his maps public – one in the House, one in the Senate and one joint committee.

Members from each group have asked Burr, legislative staff and other key map players multiple times for incumbency information so that they could accurately assess the effect of changing judicial boundaries. So far, no one in an official General Assembly capacity has provided lawmakers with that information. [[Read more...](#)]

Bonus read:

- [House, Senate agreement on judicial reform won’t come this week](#)



4. Bureaucracy for bureaucracy’s sake: Why work requirements for Medicaid do not represent a reasonable healthcare compromise

It’s one of the great and bitter ironies of our modern American policy debates that it is conservatives who are often the chief architects of the largest and least useful government bureaucracies.

No, this is not intended as a dig at the military or our departments of transportation.

Think about it for a minute: What is the chief function of our public bureaucracies? As anyone who has ever paid a visit to their local Social Security office or argued with a school secretary over a student’s eligibility for a reduced price lunch can attest, the answer (at least when it comes to safety net programs) is to jealously guard and carefully mete out public resources. If you’ve been lucky enough to avoid such experiences, think for a moment of your health insurance company and all of the people and bureaucratic process and jargon it takes to assess your occasional claims. Now, think of what that process would be like if you were a low-income person with limited education trying to access some basic assistance that might keep you from becoming homeless. [[Read more...](#)]



5. UNC Board of Governors squares off over new healthcare partnership

A proposed partnership between Charlotte-based Carolinas HealthCare System and UNC Health Care is further dividing an already fractured UNC Board of

Governors.

When the board meets Friday morning, it will be amid cross-accusations of illegal and unethical behavior over the proposal, which would create one of the country's largest healthcare systems.

At issue: a potential consolidation that would create a new UNC Health Care/Carolinas HealthCare joint operation that would include more than 50 hospitals and employ more than 90,000 people.

The new venture, first proposed in August and expected to be finalized early this year, would be overseen by an independent board. But in their role overseeing UNC's medical school, the board of governors have hotly debated the deal and whether they can block it if they find it not in the system's best interest. [[Read more...](#)]

*** Coming-up Tuesday, a very [special conversation](#) on the unfunded class-size mandate and education policy. [Register today.](#)



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